

## REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION - GOP, CITY MAKING PLANS FOR '08 EVENT - OFFICIALS WORKING OUT DETAILS ON PROTESTERS, PARKING AND SECURITY

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Just weeks after Republicans took a licking in the off-year elections, they're getting ready to stage a comeback, and a national party convention to boot, in St. Paul.

City Attorney John Choi and other officials have begun negotiating with Republican officials on the contract that will formally bring the convention to the Xcel Energy Center, the city's marketing director, Erin Dady, said Wednesday. She said they will meet again this month and plan to officially sign off on the convention Jan. 18 in Washington, D.C.

The host committee is in the process of hiring an executive director and putting together a staff, Dady said, after a Wednesday presentation to the City Council on the status of convention preparations. The city and the committee also will prepare a security plan, a parking plan, an emergency medical plan and a technology and telecommunications plan.

"This is an incredibly exciting opportunity," Dady told the council. "We certainly have never hosted an event of this size and probably never will again, so I really believe this is an opportunity of a lifetime for the city."

She estimates the convention will bring more than \$100 million into the local economy.

For all the preparations for accommodating the Republicans as they choose a presidential contender in 2008, most of the discussion Wednesday in St. Paul City Hall touched on opponents of the GOP and the party's hopes to retain the White House.

Rumors that convention protesters would be relegated to Harriet Island have sparked concern. City Council Member Dave Thune said he didn't want protesters "scuttled off" away from the convention site.

"No area has been designated for protesters at this time," Dady told Thune and the rest of the council. "It's simply too early to know where the protesters will be located. I have already met with some groups interested in protesting and had conversations with the (American Civil Liberties Union)."

She added, however, that Democratic-Farmer-Labor Mayor Chris Coleman and his administration are "committed to protecting First Amendment rights."

City officials also discussed what might happen at the Dorothy Day Center, the city's highest-profile homeless shelter, which is right across the street from the Republican National Convention.

"The Dorothy Day Center is a particular concern of mine and the mayor's," Dady said. "We need to pay special attention to that center and if there's any relocation that needs to take place."

That's expected to depend on security for the event. The convention is likely to be designated a so-called National Security Special Event, which will make the U.S. Secret Service the lead law enforcement agency for it. Dady said Assistant St. Paul Police Chief Matt Bostrom, son of City Council Member Dan Bostrom, will be the lead local law enforcement officer for convention preparations in St. Paul.

More information is likely to come out in coming months: Organizers are planning a vendor directory, listing local businesses and the services they might offer to conventioners and guests. The city has also set up an e-mail address, [convention@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:convention@ci.stpaul.mn.us), for residents to offer suggestions or concerns regarding the event.

But the preparations aren't all serious: Thune jokingly offered to host the headquarters of GOP opponents at his Irvine Park home, only blocks from the Xcel Energy Center.

"I've been approached by all sorts of very wealthy Republicans that want to lease out my house for cocktail parties," Thune said. "I'm affirming my commitment to hosting only people protesting our current president."

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